



**Testimony of John A. Torres
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Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources
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Good morning Chairman Souder and Representative Watson. Thank you for the invitation to testify on behalf of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. ATF is keenly aware of the nationwide gang problem that plagues our communities. Investigating gang violence is one of our top priorities. We understand the urgency of reducing gun violence committed by and against youth and we are dedicated to making America safer. Gun violence negatively impacts our families and our communities. ATF initiatives are designed to identify, arrest and prosecute those offenders responsible for crippling our community and also to deter young people from joining violent gangs.

Since our inception as a Bureau in 1972, we at ATF have gained a great deal of expertise in the investigation of violent street gangs. ATF's core jurisdiction--enforcing laws that prohibit the criminal misuse of firearms and explosives--has placed us at the center of gang investigations involving groups such as the Jamaican posses, the Crips and Bloods, Asian gangs, and Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), to name a few. As the only federal agency that focuses exclusively on violent crime and that regulates commerce in firearms and explosives, ATF has unique statutory authority over the "tools of the trade" that make gangs a threat to public safety.

I would like to share with you some brief examples of how ATF-led gang-enforcement activities are having an impact and making our communities safer.

In Los Angeles, ATF conducted an investigation targeting numerous Crips street gangs trafficking weapons and narcotics. These gangs were also involved in armed robberies, homicides and drive by shootings in the area. To date, 37 individuals have been charged with conspiracy to violate federal firearms and narcotics laws. As a result of the investigation, cocaine, methamphetamine, and a total of 19 firearms and \$50,000 in counterfeit currency have been recovered.

Recently, in Northern Virginia, ATF conducted an 18-month undercover investigation where an MS-13 operation was disrupted and dismantled. The investigation uncovered the purchase of over 80 firearms, cocaine and marijuana. To date, 20 of the defendants have pled guilty or have been found guilty in jury trials. Three of these defendants have been implicated in the murder of a former FBI informant who was scheduled to testify against an MS-13 member regarding a murder. One defendant was sentenced to 30 years imprisonment and 2 additional defendants are facing the death penalty.

Of course, our efforts to combat gang violence are not limited to Los Angeles and Virginia. In fact, Chairman Souder, our Fort Wayne, Indiana Field office investigated a firearms trafficking conspiracy consisting of 24 persons who purchased 156 firearms utilizing a multitude of straw purchasers from local firearms dealers. The two ring leaders, who are gang members, paid close friends and associates to purchase firearms in Fort Wayne and several surrounding counties. The firearms' serial numbers were obliterated, and the guns were then delivered to gang members throughout the Fort

Wayne and Chicago areas. Many of these firearms were recovered from notorious Chicago gangs such as the New Breed, Vice Lords, Four Corner Hustlers, Gangster Disciples and Black Stones. The firearms recovered had been used in the commission of serious felonies including aggravated assault, robbery and narcotics trafficking. The two ring leaders were found guilty of Federal firearm violations in April of 2005 and sentenced to serve 52 months and 110 months in federal prison, respectively.

Our work in Los Angeles, Virginia, Fort Wayne and Chicago is part of a larger national picture. These efforts to combat gang violence nationally are a major part of the Project Safe Neighborhoods—or PSN—initiative. PSN is the President’s violent crime reduction initiative for the prevention and prosecution of gun and gang crime. Since the program’s inception, ATF has led enforcement efforts by working closely with our State and local partners to investigate gangs and other violent firearms offenders. In FY 2005, ATF investigations resulted in the conviction of 8,353 defendants on firearms-related charges. This represents an increase of more than 17 percent over the previous fiscal year. In the past two years (fiscal year), more than 12,000 firearms linked to gang activity have been recovered in crimes, leading to a variety of criminal charges, including continuing criminal enterprise (CCE), Racketeer Influenced Corrupt Organization (RICO) Act, and arson and explosives violations.

The Attorney General describes gang-related violence as the second most critical domestic crime priority behind only the war on terror. Combating violent crime is such a priority for the Attorney General that he has announced, in addition to expanding PSN to include new and enhanced anti-gang efforts, a Comprehensive Anti-Gang Initiative that focuses resources on gang prevention, enforcement and offender reentry efforts in six

sites throughout the country. Los Angeles is one of the sites participating in this initiative, along with Tampa, Cleveland, Dallas/Ft. Worth, Milwaukee and the “222 Corridor” that stretches from Easton to Lancaster in Pennsylvania. The Department of Justice is making available \$2.5 million to each of these sites to support the anti-gang effort. ATF plays a critical role in these initiatives through our enforcement efforts, and also through our prevention strategies such as the Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) program, the “Don’t Lie for the Other Guy” campaign, and through participation in PSN training conferences and public service announcements. ATF continues to work in coordination with other Departmental components, including the United States Marshals Service, which leads a Congressionally-established Regional Fugitive Task Force in Los Angeles.

Firearms trafficking – the illegal diversion of firearms out of lawful commerce and into the hands of prohibited persons (such as convicted felons, drug dealers and juveniles) – is often the method by which gangs and youths arm themselves. The comprehensive tracing of guns used in crimes is a key component to identifying firearms traffickers. By tracing the origins of firearms recovered in crimes, patterns emerge that allow investigators to identify gun traffickers.

The ATF Firearms Trafficking initiative targets those people who are prohibited from obtaining firearms and the firearms traffickers who arm them. According to ATF statistics, since FY 2000, convictions in trafficking cases have increased by more than 150 percent. Through our partnerships with other federal, state and local law enforcement, we continue our efforts to track and report illegal sources of firearms trafficking involving youths.

Another tool ATF deploys is the National Integrated Ballistics Information Network (NIBIN) which utilizes imaging technology to compare gun crime evidence. The technology is designed to link recovered bullets and shell casings to other crimes. Since the inception of NIBIN, ATF and our partners have imaged more than 930,000 pieces of evidence and confirmed over 12,500 “hits” providing valuable information to investigators. In Los Angeles, we also operate a Regional Crime Gun center where we analyze firearms recovery information to identify trafficking patterns and trends in order to assist investigators.

I would like to acknowledge our outstanding partnership with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the United States Marshals Service, the Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Customs and Border Protection, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, the Los Angeles Police Department, the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, the California Department of Corrections, and the Los Angeles County Probation Department in our continued efforts to combat youth violence.

Chairman Souder and Representative Watson, on behalf of the men and women of ATF, I thank you for your time and interest in the work performed by our agency to reduce juvenile crime and gang violence. Historically, we have worked to stop those whose violent and criminal behavior threatens the peace of our communities. We have partnered with Federal, State, local law and international law enforcement to dismantle gangs and prosecute those committing violent crimes. We are determined to succeed in our mission of preventing terrorism, reducing violent crime and protecting our nation. Thank you again, I will be happy to answer any questions you have.